

Quarterly Koala Report for February 2017

Myall Koala & Environment Group



"Princess" on Kingfisher Avenue 3rd January 2017
(Photo: Martin Shulz)

Kingfisher Avenue – the Ongoing Nightmare

As most people would be aware, the Myall Koala Group contributed \$5,000 towards the cost of the radar-activated speed sign at the foot of the Singing Bridge in an attempt to slow traffic on Kingfisher Avenue. Kumar Kuruppu from MidCoast Council recently reported in the press that vehicle average speeds along Kingfisher Avenue had actually increased (slightly) since the new sign was installed and there was even one driver doing 150.9 kph! So it would appear that we and Council have wasted our money.

This stretch of road is dangerous for our small population of endangered koalas because it intersects the narrowest part a vegetation movement corridor between Hawks Nest and the national park. As the signs say - "Koalas Cross Here"! You can see in the photo "Princess", one of our well known koalas (since 2009). She has a propensity to cross Kingfisher Avenue, not only on the 3rd of January but she also did it on New Years Eve.

We have had SIX koalas killed on Kingfisher Avenue in the past three years, including a mother with a baby in September last year. Our small koala population can ill afford such carnage.

We are in negotiations with Council to implement other strategies to slow traffic in the area but so far they have been either far too expensive or have been resisted by Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), the regulatory body for roadways. Our radar sign manufacturers are currently researching infrared cameras to attach to the sign to identify speeders to enable infringement notices to be issued. This is not too far away, thank heavens.



Koala Tracking Dogs

Last week we had a visit from Olivia Woosnam and Alex Dudkowski and their koala tracking dogs Taz and Nutmeg. They gave a demonstration of the amazing skills these dogs have learned. They can detect a koala scat (poo), which is about the size of an olive seed, from up to 200m away. They pick up the scent downwind from the scat and then zig zag their way towards the point where it is located. The dog then indicates to its handler and is immediately rewarded with a game of ball or a cuddle (or both). These dogs can scan up to 15 bush sites a day and work up to 10

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hours (as do their handlers). Taz has also been trained recently to detect quoll scats as well.

Koala Sightings Hotline

In our last report we advised that koala sightings for spring were well down on the previous year. The good news is that sightings increased significantly in summer and were above the previous year. We are now on track to have higher reporting numbers in the 12 months.

PLEASE report your koala sightings on our Hotline answering machine – 4997 0878.

Gail & Ian Morphett (4997 1550), Myall Koala & Environment Group

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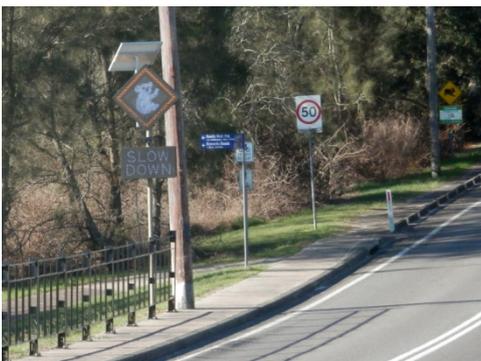


Koala in The Grange
(Photo: Ian Morphett)

Koala Retires to the Grange

For many years, the vast majority of koala sightings reported on our Hotline answering machine (4997 0878) have been in Hawks Nest. In fact, the last confirmed sighting in Tea Gardens was in June 2014 near the Craft Centre. So it was quite a surprise to receive a call late one afternoon recently about a koala scratching at someone's front door in Willow Circuit in The Grange retirement village. By the time we got there, he had had many photos taken and decamped up a deciduous tree as you can see in the photo – not much food up there. The residents were concerned about what should be done about the big healthy boy. Firstly, we warned that nobody should attempt to pick him up because they have very long sharp claws and need to be handled in a very particular way to avoid injury. Next we assessed whether we should intervene. He appeared to be healthy, was able to climb trees and was quite active. We decided not to create stress by capturing him and to leave him to find his own way out of the village, particularly as we didn't know where he had actually come from. We left our phone number in case of any concerns but didn't hear any more. So the strategy obviously worked.

This year Koalas may be reacting to the recent long spell of warmer than normal weather during July and August. The males appear to be thinking that spring has arrived and are out looking for a mate. While at the Grange we rang Port Stephens Koalas, our sick and injured koala support group, to confirm our decision not to do anything about our Grange retiree. They advised they are receiving an unusually large number of calls about active koalas, including a recent spike in car hits on the roads. Sadly, in late July, we received a call about a male koala killed on the Pacific Highway at the Tea Gardens turnoff.



The Sign is BACK!

In late March the radar-activated speed sign asking motorists to "SLOW DOWN" when the 50KPH speed limit is exceeded, stopped working. After many failed attempts to get it working again, including replacing the rechargeable battery inside, the sign maker finally took it away to their factory in Newcastle for repair. In early August the sign came home, apparently with a brand new motherboard.

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Kingfisher Avenue

We continue to talk to MidCoast Council to try to come up with additional traffic calming measures on the road between the Singing Bridge and Ibis Avenue to reduce the risk of more koala deaths. Some of our earlier suggestions such as roundabouts at each end (too expensive), speed bumps (lack of community support) and ripple strips (too noisy for the neighbours) are "off the table". One option is to have "Koala Zone" painted one or more times along the roadway, although red (bus lane) and green (cycle lane) are not permitted due to RMS rules. Another possibility being investigated is to install "speed cushions" which are narrow speed humps that slow cars and utes but allow buses and trucks to avoid bouncing over them.

Koala Sightings

As is usual, there have not been many koala sightings over winter (in fact six) but the numbers are picking up a little in August.

We ask the community to report their sighting to us every time you see a koala anywhere in the Myall Coast area. Just phone our koala sightings Hotline answering machine on 4997 0878.

Gail & Ian Morphett (4997 1550), Myall Koala & Environment Group

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New Signage Coming to Kingfisher Avenue

In an endeavour to further remind drivers to watch out for koalas that frequently cross Kingfisher Avenue, MidCoast Council has agreed to paint signage on the roadway. There will be signage similar to this at the foot of the Singing Bridge and at the intersection with Ibis Avenue. In addition, there will be large koala images facing in both directions in the middle of the danger stretch.

Koalas Spring to Life

Like many wildlife creatures, Spring is the start of the breeding season for koalas. This year has been a particularly active one with twice as many sightings being reported to us compared to last year in September and October (28 compared to 14). However, we haven't yet had any reports of mothers with last year's babies on their back which is usual at this time of year.

However, there have been a few sightings this Spring in less common places. For the first time since 2009 a koala was photographed heading towards Yacaaba along Jimmy's Beach. Two koalas were spotted in North Arm Cove (Somerset Avenue and Eastslope Way) and two have been seen in Pindimar (Cambage Street and Kyah Street).

Of course there have been sightings in most of the usual hotspots of Eagle Avenue, Ibis Avenue, Mermaid Avenue, Binda Street, Yamba Street, Booner Street, Mirreen Street, Kikarra Crescent, Cooloon Street and Russell Street. However, we haven't had any sightings so far in Winda Woppa or Swan Bay.

Koala Sightings

We again ask the community to please report their sighting to us every time you see a koala anywhere in the Myall Coast area. An interesting recent development is the number of people telling everyone about their koala encounters on the Tea Gardens Hawks Nest Community Noticeboard on Facebook. We regularly monitor the Facebook page, as do a few of our friends, so if you find it easier to report sightings there, GREAT. But we still have our koala sightings Hotline answering machine on 4997 0878.

Gail & Ian Morphet (4997 1550), Myall Koala & Environment Group